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Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches to improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

In its resolution 60/151 of 16 December 2005, the General Assembly welcomed the activities of the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa at Yaoundé and noted with satisfaction the support provided for the establishment of the Centre by the host country. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to provide the Centre with additional funds and human resources in order to enable it to efficiently respond to increased needs in the field of promotion and protection of human rights and to contribute to the development of the culture of democracy in Central Africa. The resolution also requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to the Assembly at its sixty-first session on the implementation of the resolution.

The present report provides an overview of the activities carried out by the Centre and the most significant developments in its operation from November 2005 to September 2006. These activities include support to capacity-building of national human rights institutions through training activities, technical cooperation activities, human rights education and dissemination of information and documentation; support to peace processes in the subregion; and development of partnerships with United Nations agencies, research and academic institutions, regional human rights mechanisms, as well as civil society organizations.

* The report is being submitted after the deadline so as to reflect the most recent developments.

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I. Introduction

1. The Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa was established in 2001 pursuant to General Assembly resolution 54/55 A of 1 December 1999, at the request of Member States that are members of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). The Centre operates under the auspices of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

2. The mission of the Centre is to contribute to the enhancement of capacities in the promotion and protection of human rights, and to support the creation and/or strengthening of national institutions. The Centre also strives to contribute to the development of a culture of human rights and democracy in Central Africa for the prevention of conflicts and the promotion of sustainable peace and development.

3. The Centre became fully operational in March 2001. In June 2002, it was officially inaugurated by the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Centre has entered its fifth year of operations. It is at present composed of three professionals: a Director (the current Director took her position on 4 September 2006), a Regional Adviser on Democracy (the new Regional Adviser is being deployed in mid-September 2006) and a Human Rights Officer. An associate expert funded by the Netherlands joined the Centre in mid-September 2005. In addition, the Centre will welcome, by the end of 2006, a regional adviser for the implementation of the Action 2 Programme and the drafting of the regional human development report for the Great Lakes region. The Centre also comprises three local staff, including a documentalist.

4. In the fulfilment of its mandate, the Centre recently took into account the five objectives of the High Commissioner's Strategic Management Plan: country engagement to develop dialogue with national key actors, OHCHR's leadership in the field of human rights, development of partnerships, strengthening of relationships with human rights mechanisms and rationalization of resources management. The framework programme submitted by the Yaoundé Centre in the context of the adoption of the High Commissioner's Strategic Management Plan and the related approved project documents includes the following four objectives: to foster development programming based on human rights and human security; to strengthen rule of law as a key to democratization; to increase the awareness of and warning mechanisms on all forms of discrimination (including against women, children and minorities), and to build a joint institutional response machinery in developing the culture of human rights and democracy.

5. In addition to support from the regular budget, which increased in the context of the biennium 2006-2007, the Centre continues to benefit from extrabudgetary resources, especially through the trust fund provided by the Government of France for a three-year period. OHCHR provides full assistance for the proper functioning of the Centre in the fulfilment of its mandate.

II. Human rights activities

A. Strengthening national capacities

1. Subregional training workshops

6. In accordance with the activities foreseen as described in previous reports, the Centre organized the three following subregional training workshops:

(a) From 14 to 16 November 2005, the Centre, in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice of Cameroon, the United Nations Development Programme and the International Committee of the Red Cross organized a subregional seminar on human rights in prisons in Central Africa, in Douala, Cameroon, for 50 participants, including, in particular, directors of penitentiary administration, from the following ECCAS countries: Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo and Rwanda. The objective of the seminar was to discuss the means to better implement international rules on detention in general, and respect for human rights in prisons in particular. Among the recommendations adopted by participants, the development of a subregional action plan to improve the conditions of detention through legislative and institutional reforms was proposed;

(b) In collaboration with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in that country, the International Labour Office and the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, the Centre organized a subregional seminar on the protection of human rights of indigenous peoples in Central Africa, in Kinshasa, from 28 to 30 December 2005. Forty-three participants representing civil society organizations and indigenous peoples' associations from Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Gabon attended the seminar. The main objective of the seminar was to help strengthen the capacity of the participating organizations and associations in the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples. In this framework, participants adopted a declaration and strategic action plan including a follow-up mechanism, through the establishment of a subregional network to monitor and report of the situation of indigenous peoples and to serve as a forum for consultation with decision-making actors at local, national and international levels on their situation. They also established a subregional network for the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples.

2. Advisory services and technical cooperation

7. During the period under review, the Centre provided support to the Governments, national human rights institutions and civil society organizations of Cameroon and the Congo.

(a) Cameroon

8. In the framework of the implementation of activities under the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2003-2007, relating to strengthening of governance, including the justice and human rights sectors, UNDP and the Centre developed a joint project to support the efforts of Cameroonian authorities to consolidate the rule of law and to promote human rights. The project includes several capacity-building activities for the National Commission on Human Rights

and Freedoms, the Human Rights Division of the Ministry of Justice and civil society organizations. In this context, UNDP and the Centre assisted the Ministry of Justice in the preparation and publication of the first governmental report on the situation of human rights in Cameroon in 2005, launched during a seminar held on 24 and 25 April 2006 in Yaoundé.

9. The Centre also provided its assistance to the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms for the elaboration of human rights curricula for primary, secondary and high educational institutions, including military academia. The *Cahiers pédagogiques* produced during a three-year process were adopted during a seminar held in Yaoundé, from 7 to 9 February 2006. This was considered as an important contribution to the implementation of the World Programme for Human Rights Education in primary and secondary schools, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 59/113 of 10 December 2004.

10. The Centre continued to provide support to the implementation of the joint OHCHR/UNDP Assistance Community Together project. In 2006, six Cameroonian non-governmental organizations working in the fields of peace (Cameroon Youth and Students Forum for Peace); governance (Global Network for Good Governance); development (*Association d'auditeurs, d'assistants et de formateurs coopératifs*; Research Institute for Development and the *Fédération des organisations rurales de l'extrême-nord*) and social issues (Forum camerounais de psychologie) rights received grants from the project. The beneficiary organizations would implement activities in the field of human rights education during a period of eight months.

(b) Congo

11. As a result of advocacy initiatives by non-governmental organizations participating in the International Conference on the Great Lakes region, regional workshops and the Centre for the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous people in Central Africa, the Government of the Congo requested OHCHR technical assistance in the elaboration of a draft law on Pygmies. OHCHR, the Centre and the International Labour Organization provided this technical assistance and organized two workshops in Brazzaville, in May and in July 2006, to ensure the participation of indigenous representatives, civil society and other relevant civil society organizations in the process. The Ministry of Justice of the Congo is expected to submit a final version to the Council of Ministers and the Parliament by the end of 2006.

3. Empowering civil society organizations

12. The Yaoundé Centre and the Centre for Conflict Prevention of Cape Town, South Africa, organized a joint subregional workshop on the role of civil society organizations in conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Central Africa, in Douala (Cameroon), from 10 to 12 April 2006. Sixty participants from Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Rwanda attended the workshop. ECCAS and the United Nations Office in the Central African Republic (BONUCA) were also represented. The aim of the workshop was to strengthen the role of civil society organizations in the fields of conflict prevention and peacebuilding through the reinforcement of their partnerships with the ECCAS and the Centre. Participants

adopted a declaration recommending to the Centre, inter alia, cooperation with civil society organizations working in the fields of human rights, conflict prevention, gender and peacebuilding in Central Africa, including for the creation of networks, fund-raising and projects formulation, monitoring and evaluation.

4. Internship programme

13. Since 2001, the Centre runs a continuous three-month internship programme for four fellows selected among candidates which includes graduate students, human rights activists, lawyers, judges and representatives of Governments, national human rights institutions and civil society organizations involved in the promotion and protection of human rights and the rule of law in the subregion.

14. The seventeenth batch of interns from Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Gabon completed their training at the Centre in March 2006. The eighteenth group of interns, from Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo completed their training in June 2006, and the nineteenth group, consisting of interns from Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic and Equatorial Guinea are expected to complete their training in September 2006. To date, 54 interns have benefited from the training programme at the Centre.

5. Information and documentation

15. The Information and Documentation Unit of the Centre continued to publish and distribute the *Bulletin des droits de l'homme et de la démocratie*. During the period under review, it published and distributed the fourteenth and fifteenth issues of the *Bulletin*.

16. As in the past, the Documentation Centre provided services to users and visitors and received several new publications from various sources, including the United Nations system.

B. Support to the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region

17. OHCHR support to the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, through the secondment of a human rights officer, has resulted not only in the successful mainstreaming of human rights in all draft protocols, programmes of action and projects, but also in establishing a legal regional framework. This framework includes draft protocols on: the prevention and elimination of genocide; protection of internally displaced persons; the rights to property of returnees; and the media. In the framework of the continued support of OHCHR to the Conference, the Centre participated in the fourth meeting of the Preparatory Regional Committee in Nairobi, from 30 January to 1 February 2006, and in the third meeting of the Regional Interministerial Committee in Bangui, from 20 to 22 February 2006. During this last meeting, the delegates to the Conference adopted the above-mentioned draft protocols to be approved by the planned Ministerial Conference and second Summit of the Heads of State and Government to be held in Nairobi by the end of 2006.

C. Development of partnerships

1. Collaboration with the Economic Community of Central African States

18. In accordance with the memorandum of understanding signed by OHCHR and ECCAS on 10 July 2002, the Yaoundé Centre continued to invite the ECCAS secretariat to attend the most important events organized under its auspices, especially the subregional workshops and seminars. In this framework, the Secretariat of ECCAS participated in the subregional seminar on "Peacebuilding and conflict prevention" for civil society organizations in Central Africa (see para. 12 above). One of the objectives of this seminar was to provide a platform for civil society actors and policymakers, including ECCAS, to engage and debate the role of civil society in developing effective action in preventing violent conflicts in Central Africa. Participants recommended to ECCAS, inter alia, to develop partnerships with civil society organizations and to cooperate with them to operationalize conflict prevention and management mechanisms, especially the Council for Peace and Security for Central Africa (COPAX), the Central African Early Warning Mechanism (MARAC) and the Central African Multinational Force (FOMAC).

2. Collaboration with United Nations agencies

19. In the context of the implementation of the United Nations policy aimed at integrating human rights into all its programmes and activities, especially through specific programmes such as Action 2, the Centre has developed a close partnership with United Nations country teams in the subregion.

20. On 18 and 25 April 2006, the Centre organized two training sessions in Yaoundé for 40 programme managers of United Nations agencies involved in an exercise aimed at supporting the Government of Cameroon in the revision of its Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme. The objective of this professional training was to ensure that the support provided by the United Nations country team in Cameroon to the Government was rights-based.

21. On the basis of the Cameroonian experience, the Centre organized a subregional workshop on "Human rights-based approaches to development" for the six States members of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Congo) and Sao Tome and Principe, in Yaoundé, from 26 to 28 June 2006. Twenty participants drawn from United Nations country teams and governmental partners of those countries shared their respective experiences in the implementation of this approach. Five experts from the Centre, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) facilitated the workshop. Participants adopted the "consensus de Yaoundé" on a human rights-based approach to development cooperation. The Yaoundé Consensus recommended to the participating Governments to assess the implementation of human rights treaties at the national level, especially with regard to the submission of reports to the treaty bodies, and to request support from country teams and the Yaoundé Centre in this regard. It also recommended to the country teams concerned to establish thematic groups on human rights; to provide support for strengthening national human rights systems, with the assistance of the Centre; and to submit an annual report on the implementation of these recommendations to the Centre.

3. Collaboration with the Department of Political Affairs

22. Since the General Assembly adopted resolution 54/55 of 1 December 1999 establishing the Yaoundé Centre, OHCHR and the Department of Political Affairs have cooperated in the implementation of preparatory arrangements for its effective functioning. During the period under review, both institutions continued their consultations with a view to strengthening this cooperation. The Africa Division II and OHCHR in New York held intensive consultations in July 2006 to discuss issues of mutual interest with regard to the work of the Centre. These consultations will continue and give the occasion to review the programme of activities of the Centre, in the light of new developments, including the High Commissioner for Human Rights Plan of Action as approved by the General Assembly in November 2005 and the launching of the United Nations Democracy Fund.

III. Conclusion

23. **On the basis of five years of work, the Centre planned to reinforce the already existing activities and initiatives and to adopt new approaches. Its plan of action for 2006 and 2007 reflects the priority thematic issues relevant to the Central African Region, as defined by the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Plan of Action, which includes rule of law and administration of justice, human rights, human security and development, discrimination and institutional capacity-building.**

24. **Within this framework, based on OHCHR general objectives in capacity-building to reduce the knowledge, capacity, commitment and security gaps, the Yaoundé Centre planned to implement the following activities: organization of regional workshops on human rights-based approaches to development; provision of assistance to integrate the rights-based approaches into national programmes, in cooperation with relevant United Nations country teams, especially in the region of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC), and into the activities of the relevant regional economic communities (ECCAS and CEMAC); provision of support to the process of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, to Governments in the adoption and/or strengthening of national legislation against all forms of discrimination, as well as to national actors in their programmes aimed at integrating human rights education into schools and academic curricula; and building regional capacity in the fields of human rights and democracy through the implementation of a training programme for civil society organizations and of an internship programme.**